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ABSTRACT

Teachers' guidebocks that accompanied commonly used kindergarten, first, and second grade language arts kits or textbooks were reviewed to determine what listening tasks and thinking skills were stressed. Five first grade, five second grade, and two kindergarten kits/textbooks were selected for review. Examination of these materials clearly demonstrated the dominance of literal comprehension tasks. Inferential comprehension was second in frequency across the three grade levels, followed by appreciation and evaluation. In view of these findings, it appears that teachers who follow the guidebooks to prepare listening-thinking tasks are asking children to think primarily at the lowest level thought processes--literal comprehension. The authors of the elementary teachers' guidebooks obviously concentrate on the literal comprehension thinking process in listening tasks, giving relatively little attention to inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation. Since elementary school children are expected to spend a great portion of each school day listening, and since listening is a primary avenue of information for children, educators need to put greater emphasis on the higher level thought processes that students will need to use throughout their educational careers. (RL)

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LISTENING-THINKING TASKS IN SELECTED ELEMENTARY LANGUAGE ARTS MATERIALS

A Research Report
Presented to
ERIC Clearinghouse on
Elementary and Early
Childhood Education

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LISTENING-THINKING TASKS IN SELECTED ELEMENTARY LANGUAGE ARTS MATERIALS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the directions kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers receive from selected language arts materials in preparing listening tasks requiring various thinking skills.

Background and Need for the Study

The concern of language arts educators with listening has been reflected in numerous research reports, professional publications, and methods textbooks. Thomas G. Devine (1978) and Sara W. Lundsteen (1979) in recent publications focused on the relationship between listening and thinking. When summarizing the last fifty years of research and theorizing about listening, Devine discussed the higher-level mental processes of listening. He said that beyond the basic instruction in paying attention, the teaching of listening actually is training in thinking. Lundsteen also has examined listening skills by comparing them with thinking skills and derived a hierarchy illustrating the relationship.

Addressing instructional concerns in the teaching of listening, Miriam E. Wilt (1974) proposed more attention be given to clear thinking in increased number of oral-aural activities. This need seemed warranted based on the findings of Kenneth L. Brown (1967), who examined provisions for the teaching of listening in fifty-four

elementary language arts textbooks. He found the extent to which listening was stressed, apart from other language arts study, was just over one-half of one percent of the lessons and pages.

Another instructional consideration, questioning strategies, also has implications for the area of listening-thinking. Frank J. Guszak (1967) investigated reading lessons conducted by 106 second, fourth, and sixth grade teachers and found that nearly seventy of every one hundred questions asked by teachers were of the thinking level of literal comprehension. Biskin, Hoskisson, and Modlin (1976) also examined questioning and found prediction and reflection techniques produced greater recall in listening tasks with their first grade and third grade populations.

Other researchers have designed listening instructional programs for young children and have found significant increases in kindergartners' and first graders' abilities to recall details, identify main ideas, and respond appreciatively (Olsen, 973; Kranzik, 1972; Blackburn, 1976). Listening instructional programs also have been designed to promote reading achievements (Ballenger, 1971; Taylor, 1973; Lewis, 1976). Students functioning in lower reading groups were found to increase in reading and listening comprehension.

A review of professional writings and listening-thinking research indicated that:

1. Children were capable of higher-level mental processes when appropriate teaching strategies were employed.
2. Instructional textbooks generally did not emphasize listening lessons apart from other lessons.

3. Lessons in listening usually produced more effective listeners.
4. Listening programs had a positive effect on reading achievement.

Statement of the Problem

This study was designed to determine the directions kindergarten, first grade, and second grade teachers received from selected language arts materials in preparing listening tasks requiring various thinking skills. The following question was considered: In what frequencies were the thinking processes of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation found in the listening tasks as described in selected elementary language arts teachers' guidebooks for kindergarten through grade two?

Methods and Procedures

Teachers' guidebooks which accompanied commonly used kits or textbooks in kindergarten, grade one, and grade two were the sources of listening tasks reviewed. Common usage for materials in grades one and two was determined by the frequency with which a kit or textbook appeared on each of the following southeastern states' adoption lists: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. These states comprise the membership of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The five most frequently adopted for first grade and the five most frequently adopted for second grade were selected for

the study. Since there were few materials adoptions specifically for kindergarten, the Peabody Language Development Kit and the Alpha Time Kit were selected for review based on their wide use. The first grade and second grade selections reviewed have an asterisk beside the authors' names in the list of references.

Using three forms developed for the study, the twelve selected sources were reviewed to determine the listening-thinking tasks contained in each. The investigator read each page of the teachers' guide and when the student was expected to listen, the investigator categorized the listening tasks according to the thinking level required of the student. These tasks included those specifically designated as listening and those which relied on listening as an avenue for the student to receive the instructional information. To be certain the investigator was categorizing the tasks consistently, a reliability study was made using two examiners, elementary education graduate students who had been teachers. The average agreement rate between the investigator and the examiners was 78.14 percent, which exceeded the 70.00 percent deemed necessary for the study. The twelve selected sources were reviewed for frequencies of tasks, for distribution of listening tasks in the various thinking categories, and for order of emphasis in the categories.

Findings and Discussion

In answering the question, "In what frequencies were the thinking processes of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation found in the listening tasks as described in

selected elementary language arts teachers' guidebooks, the following became evident. The frequencies and percentages of listening-thinking tasks from the kindergarten sources are presented in Table I, from the first grade adoptions in Table II, and from the second grade selections in Table III.

The greatest frequencies of listening-thinking tasks in the kindergarten kits' guidebooks were in the literal comprehension category followed by inferential comprehension, appreciation, and evaluation. In the first grade selections reviewed, the distribution of listening tasks indicated the order of emphasis was the same in each, literal comprehension, followed by inferential comprehension, appreciation, and evaluation. In the second grade selections, the order of emphasis was the same for three of the five sources, literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation. The other two sources placed more emphasis on appreciation than evaluation.

Literal comprehension was stressed in the kindergarten materials since between three-fifths and four-fifths of the tasks fell in this category. In the first grade materials, literal comprehension tasks comprised from one-half to seven-eighths of the total. Likewise, in the second grade, the most frequently occurring category was literal comprehension with one-half to three-fourths of the tasks in this category.

Inferential comprehension was the second most frequently occurring category of listening-thinking tasks in materials for all three grade levels. In the kindergarten materials, one-tenth to three-tenths of the tasks required inferential thinking. In the first grade selections,

TABLE I

FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF LISTENING-THINKING TASKS; KINDERGARTEN SOURCES

Title of Selection	Categories								Total Number Tasks
	Literal Comprehension		Inferential Comprehension		Evaluation		Appreciation		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Peabody Language Development Kit	879	82.54	108	10.14	32	3.00	46	4.32	1,065
Alpha Time Kit	1,381	60.23	710	30.96	22	0.96	180	7.85	2,293

TABLE II

FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF LISTENING-THINKING TASKS; GRADE ONE SOURCES

Title of Selection	Categories: Literal Comprehension f	Literal Comprehension %	Inferential Comprehension f	Inferential Comprehension %	Evaluation f	Evaluation %	Appreciation f	Appreciation %	Total Number Tasks
Patterns of Language	559	87.07	48	7.48	17	2.65	18	2.80	642
Language for Daily Use: Let's Talk and Write	332	89.49	22	5.93	4	1.08	13	3.50	371
Experiences in Language: Listening, Reading, Talking	172	53.58	85	26.48	25	7.79	39	12.15	321
Composing Language: Steps	45	60.81	13	17.57	5	6.76	11	14.86	74
Secret Hand	121	51.49	64	27.23	15	6.38	35	14.90	235

TABLE III

FREQUENCIES AND PERCENTAGES OF LISTENING-THINKING TASKS; GRADE TWO SOURCES

Title of Selection	Categories								Total Number Tasks
	Literal Comprehension		Comprehension		Evaluation		Appreciation		
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
Patterns of Language	508	71.65	131	18.48	53	7.48	17	2.39	709
Language for Daily Use: Let's Talk and Write	425	77.98	76	13.95	29	4.77	18	3.30	545
Experiences in Language: Listening, Reading, Talking, Writing	289	63.52	117	25.91	13	2.86	36	7.91	455
The Macmillan English Series: Text-Workbook	216	84.71	33	12.94	6	2.35	0	0.00	255
Tiger Tree	215	55.41	112	28.87	22	5.67	39	10.05	388

inferential tasks ranged from one-twentieth to approximately one-fourth of the total tasks. In the second grade materials, inferential tasks ranged from approximately one-twelfth to one-fourth of the total.

Appreciation generally was the third most frequently occurring listening-thinking category across the three grade levels; however, little attention was given to appreciative thinking in the actual numbers of tasks. In the two kindergarten guidebooks, appreciation made up approximately four to eight percent of the tasks. In the first grade materials, the distribution of scores ranged from approximately two to fifteen percent in the five sources. In the second grade materials, appreciation tasks ranged from zero to ten percent.

Evaluation generally was last in the ranking of listening-thinking categories for the three grade levels. In the kindergarten materials, less than one percent to three percent of the tasks were scored in this category. In the first grade sources, evaluation tasks ranged from just over one percent to approximately eight percent. Similarly, for the second grade guidebooks, the range was from approximately two to eight percent.

In view of these findings, it is evident that literal comprehension dominated the thinking categories across the three grade levels in the listening tasks. Inferential comprehension was second in frequency across the three grade levels. Generally, appreciation was third, while evaluation was last in the rankings.

Conclusions

In view of the findings above, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Teachers who follow guidebooks in designing listening-thinking tasks are asking children to think primarily at the lowest level thought process of literal comprehension.
2. Authors of elementary teachers' guidebooks concentrate on the literal comprehension thinking process in listening tasks, while inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation receive relatively little attention.

Recommendations for Educators

Since elementary school children are expected to spend a great portion of each school day listening, and listening is a primary avenue of information for children, the following recommendations are made for educators (Wilt, 1950; Smith, 1978):

1. Classroom teachers must provide more listening tasks than those found in guidebooks which involve the thinking processes of inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation.
2. Educators must assess their textbooks and make selections which stress the higher-level thought processes of inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation, as well as literal comprehension.

The current study has implications for related research. The study should be replicated using other elementary language art materials and a similar study is needed of curriculum materials in other subject areas. Also, a study is needed of materials designed for use with older children. Teachers' in-class practices in listening

tasks should also be investigated and compared to the directions found in guidebooks and methods textbooks to determine the extent to which the four categories of tasks actually are used. In addition, in-service programs need to be studied to determine the amount of attention given to listening-thinking learning.

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